Beijing, Moscow lead critical chorus

Lat-Am leaders slam move as breach of sovereignty, European bloc offers muted criticism

BENGALURU: A socialist activist takes part in a protest against the US attack on Venezuela.—AFP

WASHINGTON: The US seizure of Venezuelan President Nicol s Maduro sparked international alarm and drew sharp condemnation from global powers China and Russia, while American allies in Europe offered a more timid, fractured response to the unilateral action.

US President Donald Trump characterised the operation as a decisive blow against narco-terrorism. However, critics at home and abroad accused Washington of conducting a "reckless" war for oil and regime change.

Beijing and Moscow, who have longstanding ties with Caracas, were quick to denounce the operation.

China's foreign ministry exprssed "grave concern" over what it called a "clear violation of international law and the basic norms of international relations", demanding Washington release Maduro immediately.

Russia went further, with foreign minister Sergei Lavrov condemning the operation as "an act of armed aggression" and calling for the immediate release of "the legitimately elected president".

In remarks that underscored the potential geopolitical ramifications, Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's security council, warned the incident demonstrated that "the only real guarantee for protecting sovereignty is having a nuclear arsenal".

Iran described the raid as "a textbook example of an act of aggression", warning that such violations of the UN charter expose the global order to "erosion and destruction".

The UN secretary general, Ant nio Guterres, was also "deeply alarmed", with a spokesperson stating the developments constituted a "dangerous precedent" and expressing concern that international law had not been respected.

Fury in Latin America

The response across South America was swift and largely hostile. Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay issued a joint statement rejecting and slamming Washington's "unilateral" military action.

Brazilian President Luiz In cio Lula da Silva said the bombing and abduction "crossed an unacceptable line". He termed the act a "grave affront to Venezuela's sovereignty" that recalls the "worst moments of interference" in the region.

Cuban President Miguel D az-Canel denounced the attack as "state terrorism", asserting it was not about fighting drugs but destroying a sovereign project.

Conversely, Ecuador President Daniel Noboa welcomed the news, posting on X that the "narco-Chavista" structure would finally collapse.

EU on diplomatic tightrope

European leaders found themselves in an awkward position, attempting to distance themselves from the operation's methods while stopping short of outright condemnation of the US.

The European Union urged respect for legal norms, though it noted Maduro "lacks legitimacy."

"Following very closely the situation in Venezuela. We stand by the people of Venezuela and support a peaceful and democratic transition. Any solution must respect international law and the UN Charter," European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen said.

French President Emmanuel Macron expressed happiness that "Venezuelan people are free from Maduro's dictatorship" but said that the "transition to come must be peaceful" and cannot be imposed externally.

UK PM Keir Starmer said London would "shed no tears" for the end of Maduro's regime but stressed the need to uphold international law.

Germany's reaction was measured, with Chancellor Friedrich Merz calling the legal assessment "complex".

The outlier was Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, a key Trump ally, who supported the raid as a "defensive intervention" against criminal state entities.

Spain, however, stated it would not recognise an intervention that "violates international law". —Agencies / Monitoring Desk

Mamdani calls Venezuelan president's arrest illegal 'regime change'

NEW YORK: Mayor Zohran Mamdani, the first Muslim to lead New York City, said on Saturday he told President Donald Trump directly that he opposed the US military's capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Mamdani, a democratic socialist, said he spoke with the president on the phone on Saturday after being briefed on Maduro's capture and arrival in New York to be prosecuted on narco-terrorism charges.

"I called the president and spoke with him directly to register my opposition to this act," Mamdani said, "and to make clear that it was an opposition based on being opposed to a pursuit of regime change, to the violation of federal international law, and a desire to see that be consistent each and every day."

The mayor, serving just his third day in office, addressed the US military strike in Venezuela during an unrelated news conference in the Greenpoint neighbourhood of Brooklyn. He did not characterise Trump's response to the call.

"I registered my opposition. I made it clear and we left it at that," Mamdani said.

Mamdani later released a more detailed statement on the social media platform X.

"I was briefed this morning on the US military capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, as well as their planned imprisonment in federal custody here in New York City," the statement read.

"Unilaterally attacking a sovereign nation is an act of war and a violation of federal and international law. This blatant pursuit of regime change doesn't just affect those abroad, it directly impacts New Yorkers, including tens of thousands of Venezuelans who call this city home."

The mayor added that his focus is "the safety of every New Yorker," and that his administration would continue to monitor the situation.—APP

Delcy Rodriguez: From Maduro's 'tigress' to acting Venezuelan president

Trump warns she faces 'bigger price' than predecessor if demands ignored

CARACAS: Delcy Rodriguez, widely known for her anti-imperialist rhetoric and dubbed "the tigress" by toppled leader Nicolas Maduro, assumed presidential powers in Venezuela following Maduro's capture by US forces in an extraordinary raid early Saturday.

The 56-year-old lawyer seeks to portray herself as a steady hand to lead the country's political transition. Following the capture, Rodriguez insisted Maduro remained the "only president" of Venezuela and demanded his release, stating the government in Caracas stood ready "to defend" the country.

However, Venezuela's Supreme Court subsequently ordered her to assume presidential powers "in an acting capacity." She is the first woman to hold the top post in the country. On Sunday, the military — which had repeatedly vowed loyalty to Maduro — recognised her as the country's interim leader.

A fierce defender of the former president, Rodriguez has served in successive governments of Maduro and his firebrand predecessor, Hugo Chavez, holding roles including foreign minister.

She has served as Maduro's vice president since 2018 and assumed the role of minister of hydrocarbons in 2024, a critical post in a nation boasting the largest proven oil reserves in the world.

"She has probably been one of Maduro's most trusted people over the years," Pedro Benitez, a political analyst at the Central University of Venezuela, said.

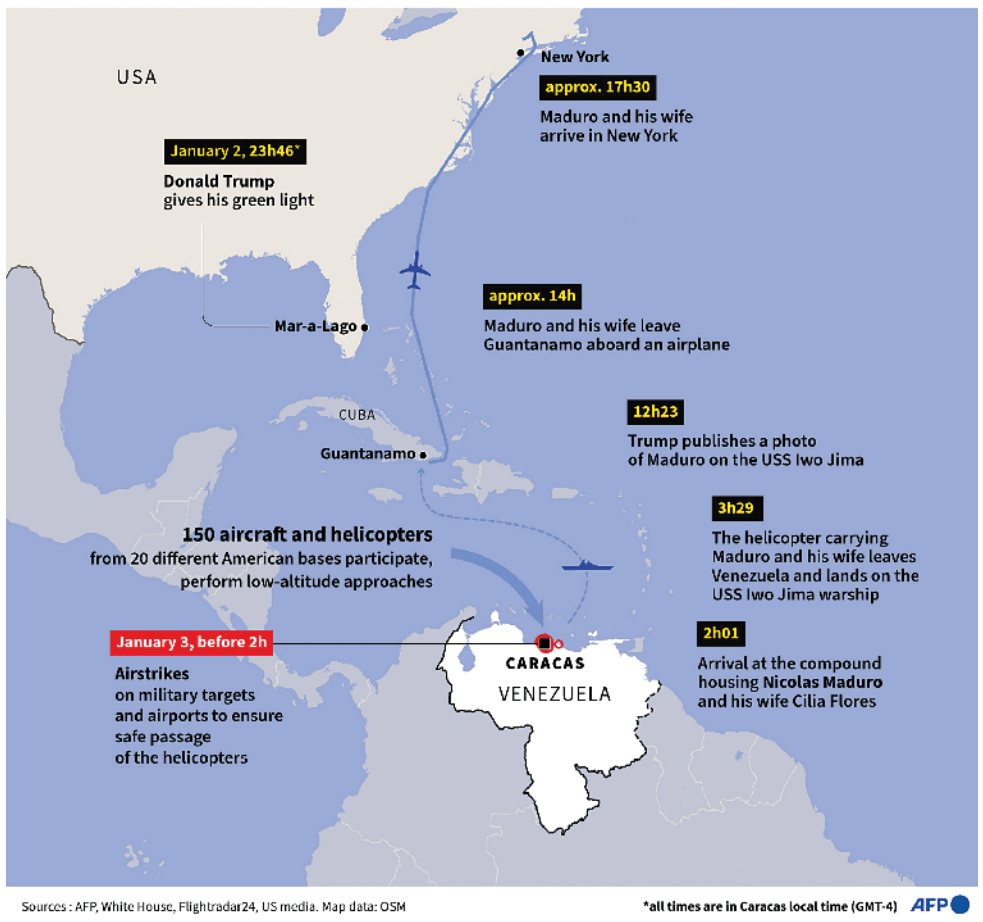
The political stakes for Rodriguez are high. US President Donald Trump has made clear that regaining access to Venezuelan oil wealth is a central goal of his pressure campaign.

Mr Trump warned Rodriguez could face a fate worse than Maduro if she fails to heed US demands on policy reforms and oil access. "If she doesn't do what's right, she is going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro," Trump told The *Atlantic*.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Sunday the United States would consider working with Venezuela's remaining leaders if they make "the right decision."—Agencies

Operation Absolute Resolve in Venezuela : how the American attack unfolded

The United States has captured Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro in Caracas in the early hours of January 3


USA
New York
approx. 17h30
Maduro and his wife arrive in New York
January 2, 23h46*
Donald Trump gives his green light
approx. 14h
Maduro and his wife leave Guantanamo aboard an airplane
Mar-a-Lago
CUBA
Guantanamo
12h23
Trump publishes a photo of Maduro on the USS Iwo Jima
3h29
The helicopter carrying Maduro and his wife leaves Venezuela and lands on the USS Iwo Jima warship
150 aircraft and helicopters
from 20 different American bases participate, perform low-altitude approaches
January 3, before 2h
Airstrikes on military targets and airports to ensure safe passage of the helicopters
CARACAS
VENEZUELA
2h01
Arrival at the compound housing Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores

Sources : AFP, White House, Flightradar24, US media. Map data: OSM *all times are in Caracas local time (GMT-4) AFP

UNSC to meet today over US action in Venezuela

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council will hold an emergency session on Monday (today) amid mounting international alarm over United States military action in Venezuela and concerns that the crisis has now moved beyond bilateral tensions..

The meeting was requested by Colombia and supported by China and the Russian Federation, with Venezuela also formally appealing to the Council. According to the Council presidency, the session will be held under the agenda item "Threats to International Peace and Security," and the secretary general is expected to brief the members.

Venezuela has sharply condemned the US action, describing it as a violation of sovereignty and an act of aggression.

In a letter to the Security Council, Venezuela's UN ambassador Samuel Moncada wrote that the operation amounted to "a colonial war aimed at destroying our republican form of government, freely chosen by our people," and at imposing "a puppet government that allows the plundering of our natural resources, including the world's largest oil reserves."

Moncada cited the UN Charter directly, recalling that it states: "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

Beijing and Moscow echoed these concerns. Both countries have stressed that their objections are rooted not in support for Maduro personally, but in the defence of what they describe as core principles of international law.

The episode has revived debate regarding Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force without Council authorisation. Diplomats warn that normalising the unilateral removal of a sitting head of state could hollow out the principle of sovereign equality and destabilise the rules-based order.

—Anwar Iqbal

Trump 'threatens' Mexico, Cuba, Colombia next

Continued from Page 1

where he makes cocaine. And yeah, I think I stick by my first statement: He's making cocaine," Trump said of Petro. "They're sending it to the United States. So he does have to watch his back."

Turning to Mexico, Trump disputed Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo's authority, despite describing her as "a good woman" during an appearance on "Fox & Friends." He claimed organised crime has superseded her government's power.

"But the cartels are running Mexico — she's not running Mexico," Trump said, warning that regarding the neighbouring country, "something's going to have to be done."

The comments drew immediate backlash from the region. Sheinbaum issued a statement saying Mexico "strongly condemns and rejects" the military action against Maduro, urging Washington to cease "all acts of aggression against the Venezuelan government and people."

Petro previously criticised the intervention as an assault on Latin American sovereignty.

The president also labelled Cuba a "failing nation" and suggested the communist-led island could face increased pressure given its close ties to Venezuela. The Cuban government provided security assistance to Maduro and relies on Venezuelan oil.

"Cuba, as you know, is not doing very well right now," Trump said. "The people there have suffered for many, many years, and I think Cuba is going to be something we'll end up talking about."

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, a long-time critic of the Cuban government, reinforced the president's stance. Rubio suggested that officials in Havana should be "concerned — at least a little bit".

Mr Trump framed the administration's aggressive posture as a push for hemispheric dominance and resource protection following Maduro's transfer to a New York prison.

"We want to surround ourselves with good neighbours. We want stability. We want energy," Trump said. "That country has tremendous energy, and it's very important that we protect it."

US president makes 'illogical' claim about 'stolen' US oil

THE dramatic capture of Nicol s Maduro and his wife follows weeks of intensifying pressure in which President Donald Trump and his top advisers openly targeted a different prize: the country's vast oil reserves.

While the White House stated the overnight extraction was necessary to halt narcotics flow, the operation serves as the culmination of a campaign justified by claims that Venezuela stole American oil assets through nationalisations decades ago.

Reports from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* detail how the administration intertwines these military actions with demands to reclaim what officials term "stolen" wealth, challenging the sovereign foundations of the South American nation.

In his Truth Social posts, Trump said the South American country must return all the oil, land, and other assets it had previously stolen from the United States. "We had a lot of oil there. As you know they threw our companies out, and we want it back," he wrote.

However, historical records analysed suggest a more complex reality.

The US presence in Venezuela dates back to the early 20th century. *NYT* reported that under dictator Juan Vicente G mez, foreign companies were granted sweeping concessions, eventually controlling 98pc of the Venezuelan market.

These companies, particularly from the US, did not just own wells; they built entire English-speaking enclaves known as "oil camps".

The first major wave of nationalisation occurred in 1976 under President Carlos Andr s P rez. According to *WaPo*, this move followed a trend of "resource nationalism" seen in Saudi Arabia and Mexico, aimed at achieving economic sovereignty.

Contrary to the current administration's description of theft, this process was largely a negotiated transition. Venezuela created the state oil company, Petr leos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), and assumed control of operations previously run by Exxon, Mobil (now ExxonMobil), and Shell.

WaPo reported that these companies, which accounted for more than 70 per cent of crude production, lost roughly $5 billion in assets. However, they were compensated approximately $1bn each. At the time, companies did not aggressively pursue larger sums, partly because they lacked modern legal mechanisms to sue sovereign governments.

Relations deteriorated significantly in 2007 under socialist leader Hugo Ch vez. Ch vez launched a new phase of nationalisation targeting the Orinoco Belt, home to the country's largest oil deposits, to fund his "Bolivarian revolution".

This move dismantled the reopening of the industry that had occurred in the 1990s. While some companies like Chevron accepted new minority stakes to remain in the country, others refused. *WaPo* noted that ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips rejected the new contract terms and departed.

This led to protracted legal battles. International arbitration tribunals eventually awarded ConocoPhillips $8.7bn and ExxonMobil $1.6bn in compensation. Venezuela, crippled by economic mismanagement, has yet to pay the full amounts.

NYT reported that for Venezuelans, oil is often viewed as a "birthright". —Monitoring Desk

US sets its sights on Venezuela's oil

Continued from Page 1

that while the US acknowledges Rodr guez's current role, it does not view the ruling socialist party as legitimate.

Rubio's comments indicated that Washington is not seeking complete regime change and sought to clarify President Donald Trump's earlier statement that the United States will "run" the Latin American country of about 30 million people.

While Trump had threatened "a second wave" of military action if needed, Rubio said US pressure would remain on Venezuela in the form of an oil export embargo enforced by Navy ships in the Caribbean.

"Ultimately, legitimacy for their system of government will come about through a period of transition and real elections," Rubio said. In separate remarks to *CBS*, Rubio warned that Washington retains leverage if officials fail to make the "right decisions", noting that judgement would be based on actions rather than public statements.

CARACAS: A woman shows damage to a residential building following a US raid on Venezuela to capture its President Nicolas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.—Reuters

The geopolitical manoeuvre also sidelined Venezuela's opposition. Opposition leader and Nobel Prize winner Mar a Corina Machado called on ally Edmundo Gonz lez — widely viewed as the true winner of the 2024 presidential election — to assume power.

However, Trump bluntly dismissed Machado's ability to govern.

"I think it would be very tough for [Machado] to be the leader," Trump said. "She doesn't have the support or respect within the country."

In Caracas, government officials decried the move as an imperialist seizure. Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, urging calm among party loyalists, said the events revealed Washington's true intent was always the nation's oil.

Maduro's extraction

The deposed Venezuelan leader was in a detention centre ahead of an expected Manhattan court hearing on narco-trafficking charges on Monday.

Handcuffed and in sandals, Maduro was escorted by federal agents through a Manhattan US Drug Enforcement Administration facility late Saturday, a video posted by the White House on social media showed.

"Good night, happy new year," the 63-year-old leftist was heard saying in English.

Earlier, he was photographed on board a US naval ship blindfolded and handcuffed, with noise-cancelling ear protectors.

Meanwhile, Venezuela's Defence Minister Gen Vladimir Padrino L pez, appearing in fatigues, signalled that the armed forces remained loyal to the ruling party.

A large part of erstwhile President Nicolas Maduro's security team was killed in the US raid that led to the leader's Saturday capture, Padrino said in a televised statement on Sunday morning.

Padrino did not give an exact figure of causalties, but backed the declaration of Vice President Delcy Rodriguez as interim president and said the armed forces have been activated across the country to guarantee sovereignty.

Pakistan concerned

Meanwhile, on Sunday, Pakistan's Foreign Office said it attached great importance to the well being of the people of Venezuela and viewed the evolving situation in the country with concern.

In a statement, FO spoksperson Tahir Andrabi said, "We urge the need for restraint and de-escalation to end the crisis, and underscore the necessity for adherence to the principles of the UN Charter as well as international law to resolve all outstanding issues."

"We are closely monitoring the developments and remain engaged in ensuring the safety and security of members of the Pakistani community in Venezuela," he added. —Agencies/Monitoring Desk